Route based forecasts

2 November 2011 - The Met Office has launched a route based forecast service - an operational decision making tool giving road operatives the opportunity to grit routes selectively.

Through using route based forecasts, operatives can streamline winter maintenance planning activities and reduce the impact of cold weather on their road networks this winter.

Route based forecasting has been developed following feedback from customers and forms part of our OpenRoad range of products. It is becoming increasingly popular among winter maintenance operatives because of it's potential to reduce the overall operational cost of winter service, by allowing treatment on a route-by-route basis.

Last year, saw the coldest December in 100 years with some areas of the UK experiencing significant snowfall, widespread ice and low temperatures between -10 and -20 °C overnight. Latest figures show that Britain will face the season this year with a bumper stockpile of more than two million tonnes of salt. Lincolnshire County Council is just one local authority which has doubled its stock levels to 42,000-tonnes based on salt usage over the last two winters.

Lincolnshire is a low-lying coastal county with over 9000km of road network. Lincolnshire County Council precautionary salts a priority network of 43 routes (approximately 3000km) throughout winter when road frosts are forecast.

David Davies, Principal Maintenance Engineer at Lincolnshire County Council, said, "We have been proud to work so closely with the Met Office on a route based forecast, supporting the trials since 2007. A route based forecast provides crucial advice on marginal nights, allowing us to treat an eighth of routes instead of the whole, half or a quarter of our network. This will allow us to conserve salt by targeting the network more efficiently, saving fuel and drivers hours. In addition we can generate significant savings for Lincolnshire County Council and provide our tax payers with better value for money."

Route based forecasts from the Met Office provide advice up to 24 hours ahead. Used as an operational decision making tool, it demonstrates considerable operational benefits to winter maintenance operatives and forms part of the OpenRoad forecast package. Together they help those responsible for maintaining the UK road network keep their road networks safe and open this winter.

John Harrison, Road and Rail Business Manager for the Met Office, said, "In any winter, we can expect hazards such as snow and ice to occur. It is vital that service providers have plans in place to react to our 1-5 day forecasts and warnings of such hazards and apply precautionary treatment to limit the impact on the travelling public. The Met Office delivers a range of weather services for the road industry. These provide good advice, and are a vital component of winter maintenance planning and operations."

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